

Organic Production and Handling Standards

The National Organic Program (NOP) regulations were developed to ensure that organically labeled products meet consistent national standards.

What agricultural operations are affected by the standards?

Any farm, wild crop harvesting, or handling operation that wants to sell an agricultural product as organically produced must adhere to the national organic standards. Handling operations include processors and manufacturers of organic products. These requirements include operating under an organic system plan approved by an accredited certifying agent and using materials in accordance with the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Non-Synthetic Substances. Operations that sell less than \$5,000 a year in organic agricultural products are exempted from certification and preparing an organic system plan, but they must operate in compliance with these regulations and may label products as organic. Retail food establishments that sell organically produced agricultural products do not need to be certified.

Standards apply to production process

The national organic standards address the methods, practices, and substances used in producing and handling crops, livestock, and processed agricultural products. The requirements apply to the way the product is created, not to measurable properties of the product itself. Although specific practices and materials used by organic operations may vary, the standards require every aspect of organic production and handling to comply with the provisions of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). Organically produced food cannot be produced using excluded methods, sewage sludge, or ionizing radiation.

Crop standards

The organic crop production standards say that:

Land will have no prohibited substances applied to it for at least 3 years before the harvest of an organic crop. The use of genetic engineering (included in excluded methods), ionizing radiation and sewage sludge is prohibited. Soil fertility and crop nutrients will be managed through tillage and cultivation practices, crop rotations, and cover crops, supplemented with animal and crop waste materials and allowed synthetic materials.

Preference will be given to the use of organic seeds and other planting stock, but a farmer may use non-organic seeds and planting stock under specified conditions. Crop pests, weeds, and diseases will be controlled primarily through management practices including physical, mechanical, and biological controls. When these practices are not sufficient, a biological, botanical, or synthetic substance approved for use on the National List may be used.

Livestock standards

These standards apply to animals used for meat, milk, eggs, and other animal products represented as organically produced.

The livestock standards say that:

Animals for slaughter must be raised under organic management from the last third of gestation, or no later than the second day of life for poultry. Producers are required to feed livestock agricultural feed products that are 100 percent organic, but may also provide allowed vitamin and

mineral supplements. Producers may convert an entire, distinct dairy herd to organic production by providing 80 percent organically produced feed for 9 months, followed by 3 months of 100 percent organically produced feed. Organically raised animals may not be given hormones to promote growth, or antibiotics for any reason. Preventive management practices, including the use of vaccines, will be used to keep animals healthy. Producers are prohibited from withholding treatment from a sick or injured animal; however, animals treated with a prohibited medication may not be sold as organic. All organically raised animals must have access to the outdoors, including access to pasture for ruminants. They may be temporarily confined only for reasons of health, safety, the animal's stage of production, or to protect soil or water quality.

Handling standards

The handling standards say that:

All non-agricultural ingredients, whether synthetic or non-synthetic, must be included on the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Non-Synthetic Substances. Handlers must prevent the commingling of organic with non-organic products and protect organic products from contact with prohibited substances. In a processed product labeled as "organic," all agricultural ingredients must be organically produced, unless the ingredient(s) is not commercially available in organic form.

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